

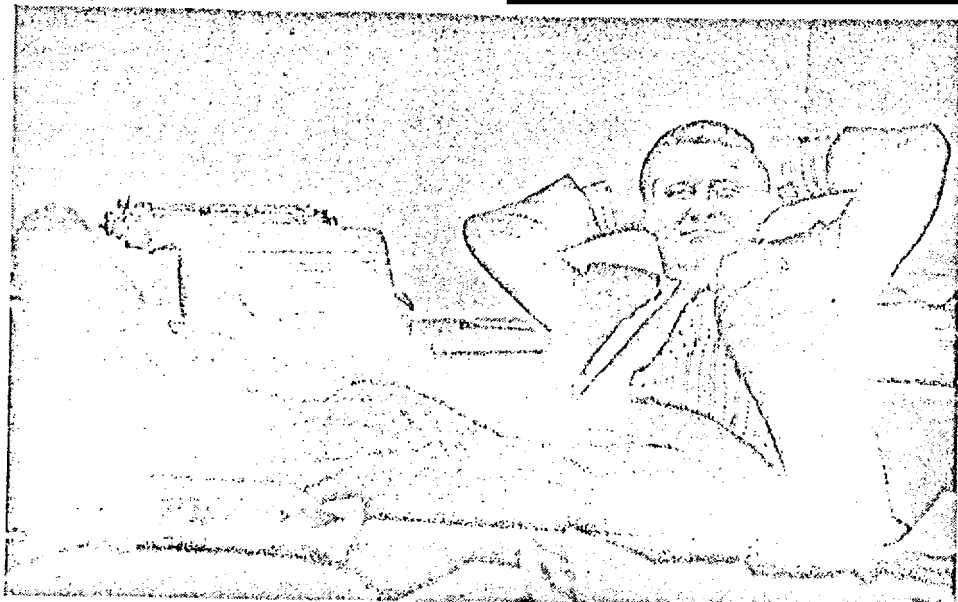
## A Muckraker With a Mission

Syndicated columnist Jack Anderson likes to say that he writes for "the Kansas City milkman." As it happens, Anderson's column does not appear in Kansas City—but his statement is still eminently apt. With its 746 newspaper outlets, The Washington Merry-Go-Round unquestionably provides more average American folks with their view of the Federal government than any column in existence. And from a reading of the column, one can only wonder why the entire hinterland has not already tried to secede.

As Anderson tells it, congressmen cheat on their income tax, philander at government expense and occasionally handle sensitive official business while gloriously drunk. White House officials are chronic liars who regularly seek to cover up clandestine involvements with big business or foreign powers. The military expends most of its energy fighting interservice battles, camouflaging cost overruns and airlifting senators to European watering holes. And mammoth corporations usually manage to buy their way into legislative favor or out of legalistic trouble. Hardly a balanced view, of course, but then Jack Anderson wouldn't be so successful a muckraker if there were not plenty of muck around to rake. "The public wants someone behind the scenes telling it like it really is," he explains. "That's my job."

These days, hardly a week goes by without some behind-the-scenes blockbuster from the burly, 49-year-old columnist. In January, Anderson published top-secret White House documents confirming the Administration's anti-Indian stance during the Indo-Pakistan war. Then he took on the Justice Department, Acting Attorney General Richard Kleindienst and the International Telephone and Telegraph Corp. with the alleged Dita Beard memo. And last week, after pausing just long enough to skewer U.S. Ambassador to France Arthur Watson for allegedly being drunk and disorderly during a recent plane flight, Anderson was back attacking ITT for its purported attempts to interfere in Chilean politics (page 18).

**Outrage:** The fact that Anderson's case against ITT has triggered an intense assault on his own credibility has only inspired the former Mormon missionary to new heights of righteous outrage. One Anderson column last week charged that the White House was trying to discredit him with "a massive undercover campaign" employing "dozens of government employees, Presidential aides and political flunkies." As Anderson told it, the Administration had even gone



Columnist Jack Anderson: A blockbuster a day keeps the 'bigwigs' at bay  
Don Carl Steffen—Rapho Gullumette

so far as to plant material critical of him with newsmen and to write anti-Anderson speeches for several GOP senators.

The columnist was also taking his case to any live audience that would hear him. Addressing a mesmerized gathering of fellow Mormons last week, Anderson did more pacing, finger jabbing and eye rolling than Oral Roberts in full cry. "The incestual [sic] relationship between government and big business thrives in the dark," boomed his rich baritone voice. "When those responsible for it get caught in the sunlight, they are like fish out of water. They flip and they flop. They backtrack. They trip over their tongues." His voice soaring, Anderson climaxed his pyrotechnics with a ringing call to action. "Are we going to tolerate this?" he demanded. "Are we going to let them corrupt us? They are not your masters. They are your servants. You have the final decision. You have the final vote!"

**Ruin:** In his own way, Jack Northman Anderson is as much of an enigma as the patrician loner from whom he inherited the Merry-Go-Round in 1969. The late Drew Pearson was a high-minded Quaker who became America's most relentless scandalmonger. Jack Anderson, an equally devout Mormon and devoted father of nine, has mercilessly catapulted half a dozen national figures to their ruin—and, according to Anderson himself, his disclosures have driven at least three men to commit suicide. Anderson, however, has only recently emerged from his departed mentor's formidable shadow. For while Capitol insiders knew all along that such celebrated Pearson victims as the late Sen. Thomas J. Dodd were actually torpedoed through Anderson's skills as an investigative reporter, the general public remained largely unaware of Pearson's intrepid junior partner.

But not any more. Today, Anderson's press almost as regularly as that of Henry Kissinger. "Jack has had more stories in

The New York Times than any Times reporter," cracks one Washington newsmen. "Maybe they ought to start paying him." As for the Merry-Go-Round, it now appears in 130 more newspapers than it did under Drew Pearson and, with an audience estimated conservatively at more than 50 million readers, is probably the most widely circulated political column in the world. As such, it draws 1,000 letters per week. Typically, Anderson's own favorite letter is one that bears only his name and a string of epithets on the envelope face. "This guy didn't even know what city I live in," the columnist says proudly. But the Post Office knew exactly which of the 18,000 Jack Andersons in the country he was mad at.

**Error:** Like those of his predecessor, however, Anderson's accuracy and modus operandi are prime targets for water-cooler carpers. "You have to read his stuff with a high skepticism quotient," says one political reporter. "Any time he touches a story, you know it's got a half-dozen errors." For his part, Anderson admits to only "one bad backfire" in the 30 months he's been running the Merry-Go-Round. Shortly after taking over, he charged that Office of Economic Opportunity director Donald Rumsfeld had lavishly redecorated his office while cutting back on OEO programs. In fact, Rumsfeld had done no such thing. The columnist offered to publish a retraction but, Anderson says, Rumsfeld decided that would only make things worse.

Despite such occasional slips, Anderson is generally credited with producing a fairer and more factual column than Pearson, who, for all his strait-laced ethics, occasionally rode ideological hobbyhorses and pursued personal vendettas. "Anderson appears to be more careful than Pearson was to deny the column to self-servers and backstabbers," says John [name obscured], a public's perceptive Washington columnist. Anderson himself also believes that the column now has